

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



THE EFFECTS OF MINNESOTA PRISON-BASED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING ON RECIDIVISM AND EMPLOYMENT

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The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) recently completed an evaluation that examined the impact of prison-based educational programming on recidivism and employment. The evaluation assessed the effects of earning secondary [general educational development (GED) or high school (HS) diploma] and post-secondary degrees on recidivism and employment among offenders released from Minnesota prisons between 2007 and 2008. The average follow-up period for the offenders in this study was 2.5 years.

KEY FINDINGS

- Obtaining a secondary degree in prison significantly increased the odds that offenders found post-release employment by 59 percent.
 - Earning a secondary degree did not have a significant impact on other employment measures such as hourly wage, total hours worked or total wages earned.
- A secondary degree did not have a significant impact on recidivism.
- A post-secondary degree did not significantly increase the chances of finding employment.
- Earning a post-secondary degree in prison was associated with more hours worked and higher overall wages.
- Obtaining a post-secondary degree significantly reduced recidivism by:
 - 14 percent for rearrest
 - 16 percent for reconviction
 - 24 percent for new offense reincarceration

Research has long shown that prisoners often lack education, stable work histories, and vocational skills. Indeed, when offenders are admitted to prison in Minnesota, nearly 40 percent do not have a GED or HS diploma. In addition to these educational and employment history deficits, a felony record has been found to diminish the likelihood of future employment, which further reduces the chances that offenders can find work

following their release from prison. The literature also indicates, however, that despite the stigmatizing mark of a criminal record, prison-based educational programming can increase an offender's odds of securing post-release employment. Moreover, research suggests offenders are more likely to make a successful transition from prison to the community when they work more often.

This evaluation examined whether prison-based educational programming in Minnesota has an impact on recidivism and post-release employment among offenders released from prison between 2007 and 2008. Of the 9,394 individual offenders incarcerated in DOC facilities and released to the community during 2007 and 2008, 38 percent (3,582) entered prison without a secondary degree (i.e., GED or HS diploma). Of these offenders, 1,212 (33 percent) earned a secondary degree in prison.

Among the 9,394 offenders released from prison during 2007 and 2008, 62 percent (5,812) had a secondary degree at the time of their most recent admission to prison. Of the 5,812 offenders, 545 earned a post-secondary degree in prison. In addition, there were 148 offenders who obtained both a secondary degree and a post-secondary degree in prison prior to their release to the community.

Propensity score matching (PSM) was used to individually match the offenders who earned a secondary degree in prison with a comparison group of offenders released from prison without a secondary degree. Similarly, PSM was used to individually match the offenders who obtained a post-secondary degree in prison with those who were admitted to prison with a secondary degree but were released without obtaining a post-secondary degree. Multivariate statistical analyses were used to determine whether earning secondary and post-secondary degrees in prison had an impact on recidivism and post-release employment.

Recidivism and Employment Results

The table below shows that offenders who obtained a secondary degree had the same rearrest rate as prisoners in the comparison group, although they had slightly lower rates of reconviction and reincarceration for a felony offense. Secondary degree offenders had a higher technical violation revocation rate than those in the comparison group. Offenders who earned a post-secondary degree in prison had lower rates of recidivism than their comparison group counterparts for all four measures.

Post-release employment data indicate that 60 percent of offenders who earned secondary degrees in prison found employment within the first two years compared to 50 percent in the comparison group. The employment rate for offenders who earned post-secondary degrees (71 percent) was slightly higher than that of the prisoners in the comparison group (68 percent). Offenders in both educational degree groups fared better than their comparison group counterparts regarding total hours worked and total wages earned. Among offenders who obtained employment, those who earned a secondary degree had a lower hourly wage than their counterparts in the comparison group. There was no difference in hourly wage for offenders who obtained a post-secondary degree in prison and those in the comparison group.

Recidivism and Employment Outcomes by Educational Degree Earned in Prison

<i>Outcomes</i>	<i>Secondary Degree</i>	<i>Secondary Comparison</i>	<i>Post-Secondary Degree</i>	<i>Post-Secondary Comparison</i>
<u>Recidivism</u>				
Rearrest	58.5%	58.5%	54.1%	59.3%
Reconviction	41.3%	43.1%	37.8%	43.4%
Reincarceration	17.3%	21.0%	14.6%	18.6%
Revocation	41.5%	37.8%	34.3%	38.4%
<u>Employment</u>				
Employment	59.5%	49.8%	71.0%	68.3%
Total Hours	885	767	1,255	1,057
Total Wages	\$10,533	\$9,082	\$16,380	\$13,432
Hourly Wage*	\$11.91	\$15.49	\$12.05	\$12.09
N	910	910	693	693

* Hourly wage calculated only for offenders who obtained post-release employment

Results from the multivariate statistical models showed that obtaining a secondary degree did not have a significant effect on any of the four recidivism measures. Although earning a post-secondary degree did not have an impact on technical violation revocations, it significantly reduced rearrest by 14 percent, reconviction by 16 percent, and new offense reincarceration by 24 percent.

The results further indicated that obtaining a secondary degree in prison significantly increased the odds of securing post-release employment by 59 percent but did not have a significant effect on other employment measures such as hourly wage, total hours worked, or total wages earned. On the other hand, earning a post-secondary degree did not increase the odds of finding post-release employment, but it was associated with more hours worked and higher overall wages.

Summary

Obtaining a secondary degree may help offenders “get their foot in the door” with employers, but the findings suggest it does not necessarily lead to better pay or more consistent employment. In contrast, offenders who earned post-secondary degrees in prison worked significantly more hours following their release to the community, resulting in a significant increase in total wages earned during the follow-up period. While ensuring that offenders find a job is important for a number of reasons, maintaining employment is what appears to be critical in reducing recidivism.

These findings suggest greater emphasis should be placed on increasing offender access to post-secondary educational opportunities. Secondary educational programming remains important, however, because it is a prerequisite to post-secondary educational enrollment. Investing more in prison educational programming, especially access to post-secondary education, may be more costly in the short term, but the evidence suggests it can produce long-term dividends by increasing offender employment and decreasing recidivism. When released prisoners maintain employment, they contribute to local, state and federal tax revenues. And, when offenders reoffend less often, they victimize fewer people and are less likely to consume costly criminal justice resources, especially prison.